MINNEAPOLIS SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND

A wide variety of games like Monopoly, bingo and chess have been modified by manufacturers so blind people can play by touch and feel.

Blind people are no different than sighted people, except for the limitation of their vision. There are blind people working in almost every kind of employment and participating in almost every type of leisure activity.

Blindness need not limit choices, but it does present visually impaired people different types of challenges in pursuing their interests and leading independent lives. This means they need a resource where they can find specially trained staff, specialized tools and training programs to use and consult in working toward their goals. Since it was founded in 1914, the Minneapolis Society for the Blind has been this resource.

The Minneapolis Society for the Blind (MSB) is an organization of blind and sighted people working together to enable blind people to lead self-directed and self-actualizing lives and to help sighted people better understand blindness. It offers the most complete range of training and rehabilitation services available to blind adults living in Minneapolis, Hennepin County and throughout Minnesota.

MSB's three primary areas of service include personal adjustment training through its Rehabilitation Center, vocational evaluation/training and employment through its Rehabilitation-Industrial Workshop, and social and personal adjustment services through its Community Rehabilitation Service.

Blindness has no respect for age, sex, intellectual level or socio-economic status. Thus, each person who becomes blind is a unique individual with his or her own unique needs for rebuilding the confidence necessary to move about and function effectively in society. For this reason, MSB services generally are provided on a one-to-one basis. Also for this reason, each blind person is directly involved with trained staff counselors in designing the training and services which best meet his or her own particular situation.

MSB is unique not only in the range of services provided, but also because it is primarily self-supporting. Each year about 10 percent of its funds are derived from the United Way and five percent, from private gifts and donations. Of the remaining 85 percent, 25 percent comes from fees for service paid by state agencies, and 60 percent, from sales of products produced in the Workshop. In 1976 MSB's total operating budget exceeded $1,750,000, including over $1,050,000 derived from the Workshop.

TOP: A blind Twin Cities computer programmer employed by a leading automation company talks with a colleague. To perform his job, he uses the Optacon and braille computer print-outs.

BOTTOM: Each blind person is directly involved with MSB counselors in designing the training and services which best meet his or her own particular needs.

1 PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT SERVICES

This blind cook is using standard cooking tools and appliances —like plastic measuring cups and a Litton microwave oven— modified for her use by braille labeling. The cool oven cavity makes microwave ovens popular among blind cooks.

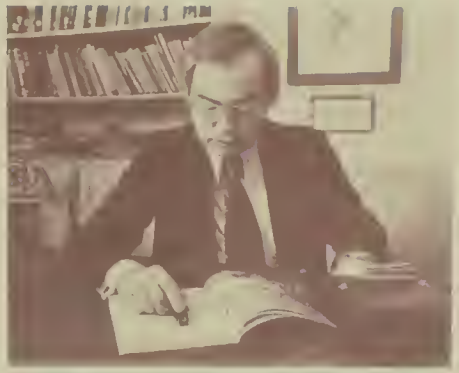
Most blind people who come to the Minneapolis Society for the Blind are recently blinded adults learning to function comfortably and efficiently without sight. MSB provides a full range of personal adjustment services through its Rehabilitation Center, established in 1957. The Center is open on a referral basis to blind adults in Minnesota and other Midwestern states.

MSB's personal adjustment services are designed to enable blind individuals to achieve their highest level of personal independence. This is accomplished through counseling about attitudes and by teaching the skills necessary to lead confident and active lives in a sighted society. Emphasis is on daily living skills. Learning these skills is usually a necessary "first step" in an individual's overall rehabilitation process and usually precedes vocational evaluation and training.

To foster independence, MSB establishes a definite conclusion point for each individual's program. However, the length of each program varies, depending on individual needs and abilities. A person's program may include one, several or all of the following services:

- Medical consultation—review and analysis of the blind person's visual and medical condition by MSB medical consultants as a means of developing the most effective rehabilitation program possible.

- Orientation and mobility training—training in the use of aids and techniques which help blind individuals feel secure and comfortable in their environment and confident moving about in it.



The Optacon is an electronic reading device enabling blind people to read standard print material. A small camera sends "pictures" of letters to the Optacon body for conversion to electronic impulses which pass under the reader's left index finger in the alphabetical shape of the letters. Special attachments are available for typewriters, calculators and CRT computer units. A magnifying lens is also available.

- Communication skills—training in Optacon (electronic reading device), typing, braille, script writing, reading by listening (tapes, recorders and sources of information) and telephone.

- Personal and home management—training in self-care (selecting and maintaining clothing, personal grooming), household care and cleaning, food preparation, eating techniques, money handling and management, and use of special aids such as braille watches and timers.

- Applied arts—orientation and reorientation to home repair and to leisure-time craft activities, including use of such equipment as power and hand tools.

- Recreation—encouraging blind individuals to explore and participate individually or with others, both blind and sighted, in leisure activities of their choice; use of community recreation resources.

- Rehabilitation counseling—individual or group discussion of the consequences of loss of vision in social relationships, family relationships, occupational information and changes, self-perception and goal setting.

- Counseling and social services—in-depth personal adjustment and family counseling as well as education about community resources.

An MSB Community Rehabilitation Representative helps a recently blinded 92-year-old nursing home resident learn to pursue her favorite passtime, knitting, by touch and feel. Her visit also gives the woman a chance to discuss her fears about blindness.

2 COMMUNITY REHABILITATION SERVICE

MSB's Community Rehabilitation Service provides all of the previously listed personal adjustment services to blind people in their own homes. Services are designed to meet needs for individual living situations.

The Community Rehabilitation Service is also available to both residents and staff members of facilities serving elderly individuals. Through the service, older blind people learn skills enabling them to participate in activities with sighted residents. Staff members benefit from consultation and in-service training programs. Society representatives also help identify many unsuspected visual problems that can be treated before damage is irreversible. When such problems are discovered, referral to the appropriate eye specialist is recommended. Appropriate services and training are subsequently provided by MSB.

VOCATIONAL EVALUATION/TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT 3

MSB's Rehabilitation-Industrial Workshop provides blind people transitional, temporary and extended employment opportunities.

A large percentage of the blind women and men employed in Minnesota have consulted MSB for vocational evaluation/training and employment services. Vocational evaluation, on-the-job training, short-term employment, transitional employment and extended employment are available. Through these services, MSB provides orientation to the working world and trains blind people whose unique needs cannot be met by conventional on-the-job training.

The vocational evaluation/training service helps blind individuals maintain or obtain gainful employment in sheltered and competitive settings. It is a carefully planned service offering actual work situations. Emphasis is on discovering and improving individual capabilities, skill development, work satisfaction, adjustment to work pressures, interpersonal communication skills and self-concept as a worker.

MSB's Rehabilitation-Industrial Workshop provides transitional, temporary and extended employment, along with on-the-job training and job-seeking skills necessary to enable blind people to move to employment in business, industry or government.

To realistically prepare them for such employment, MSB provides training on machines and in assembly line operations which approximates the training offered in other production plants doing similar work. The Workshop is equipped with a wide variety of presses, stamping equipment, jigs, fixtures and other production tools and machinery.

The Workshop produces textile merchandise for government agencies and commercial use and does contract work for many Minnesota-based companies. It also produces a number of home care products under the Skilcraft[T.M.] brand name. These products are sold through wholesale distributors.

MSB also plans and coordinates job placement services through the Minnesota State Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped.

CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT

MSB continually seeks and develops new approaches for serving the constantly changing needs of blind people. All efforts grow out of MSB's conviction that these needs can be met most effectively by drawing from the knowledge, ideas, talents and skills of both blind and concerned sighted individuals.

MSB provides training on machines and assembly line operations which approximates the training offered in other production plants doing similar work.

MSB's primary objectives are to provide ways for blind individuals to enhance their personal independence and employability and to assist them in integrating themselves into the sighted community.

In determining the content of its services, MSB actively seeks the advice of organizations and individuals with expertise in those services, as well as the advice of blind individuals in its various programs and the blind community-at-large. MSB works with both public and private organizations like the Minneapolis Area United Way, the State Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, the Governor's Citizens' Council on Aging and the Twin Cities Diabetes Association. These organizations and individuals serve as consultants, members of MSB's committees and members of MSB's board of directors. The board, ultimate policymaker for MSB, is composed of both blind and sighted individuals. Services are implemented by MSB's administrative and instructional staff, about half of whom are blind.

MSB's orientation and mobility training program helps blind people feel secure, comfortable and confident moving about in many kinds of environments. This woman wears sunglasses not for cosmetic purposes, but because intense light hurts her eyes.

HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE?

Most blind people are referred to MSB by public and private agencies. However, if you are visually impaired and interested in obtaining the services of MSB, you are invited to call MSB any time between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, at (612) 871-2222. Or, you may call the Minnesota State Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped hot line anytime — (612) 296-8137.

There are two ways sighted individuals can participate in MSB programming.

Although MSB is primarily self-supporting, funds are always needed and welcomed. You can, if you choose, sponsor a project, the cost of a rehabilitation teacher, volunteer coordinator or mobility instructor. You can sponsor many activities by unit cost. You also may donate the cost of a new piece of equipment. Or you can simply make a cash donation by pledge or deferred gift.

MSB also welcomes your contribution of time. Many MSB services are most effectively provided through a one-to-one relationship between the blind person and a staff member. An adequate staff of volunteers is critical in making this possible. Through the use of trained volunteers MSB is able to serve more blind individuals. Volunteers may provide sighted assistance for blind staff and other blind people in MSB programs.

They may serve as drivers for individuals or small groups of people going to and from MSB or community events, help blind individuals with such things as shopping and social or recreational activities and help with typing, mailings and other secretarial projects. If you would like to volunteer, you can obtain more information by calling the volunteer coordinator for MSB.

Blind people learn to ski through a cooperative program sponsored by MSB and Snowcrest ski area. When they have mastered the basic techniques, MSB volunteers ski with them as sighted "buddies."

LOCATION

MSB is conveniently located at 1936 Lyndale Avenue South in Minneapolis. It is near downtown Minneapolis and within half a block of the interstate freeway system. Buslines run past its front door at the intersection of Lyndale and Franklin Avenues.

MSB's physical plant is an 86,000 square foot two-story brick building. It has been certified by the Governor's Commission for the Handicapped as architecturally barrier-free.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

MSB sends speakers, both blind and sighted, into the community as part of its educational outreach program to help sighted people learn about the needs and capabilities of blind people. If you would like an MSB representative to address your group, or if you would just like more information about blindness, call 871-2222.

MSB is conviently located at the intersection of Lyndale and Franklin Avenues.

WHAT IS BLINDNESS?

Few people are totally blind. In fact, only about 11 percent of blind people are completely without vision. Most people with vision impairments have some residual vision and may see something, although it is usually blurred or otherwise severely distorted.

A person is legally blind if he can identify only at 20 feet or less, what a person with normal vision can identify at 200 feet, or if his field of vision is so restricted that he can see only a very small area at one time.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE BLIND?

There are over 15 million blind people in the world. The majority live in developing countries, where blindness is usually caused by infectious diseases, rather than by degenerative conditions, accidents or heredity.

While accurate figures are hard to get, it is estimated that there are about 430,000 blind people in the United States, or about two in every thousand. In the last 25 years, while the general population of the United States has increased about 36 percent, the blind population has risen about 67 percent. If this trend continues, about 500,000 more Americans will become blind in the next decade.

There are approximately 8,000 - 10,000 legally blind people living in Minnesota. About half of these people live in the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area.

About half of all blind people are 65 years of age or older; about 40 percent are between 20 and 64; and 10 percent, under 20.

WHAT CAUSES BLINDNESS?

Any individual, regardless of age, sex or economic status, can become blind. A person who is born blind is congenitally blind, while a formerly sighted person who has become blind through disease or accident is adventitously blind.

There are over 200 eye diseases which cause blindness. However, in the United States there are three main causes: glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy. The latter is the most rapidly growing cause, accounting for about 14 percent of all new cases.

The increasing number of elderly people in our population and the increasing life expectancy which brings with it a high rate of blindness from diseases of age are the two main causes of the increase in blindness in the United States in recent years.

Despite the rise in the number of blind people, medical science is making steady gains. The discovery in the early 1950s that excess oxygen is the cause of retrolental fibroplasia (loss of vision in the prematurely born child) has saved the sight of countless numbers of children. Thousands of elderly people now benefit from delayed surgical techniques impossible a decade ago. The increasing use of donated corneas for transplantation and discovery of other suitable materials for use in corneal transplants now offer new hope for some people formerly considered permanently blind. Advances in drug treatments for diseases of the eye or diseases which cause blindness have also been made.

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